DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 456 454 CS 217 700

AUTHOR	Seranis, Panos
TITLE	Revitalising the Learning of Latin: The Recontextualisation of "Literacy" Skills On-Line.
PUB DATE	2001-07-00
NOTE	12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Education Research Network (8th, Spetses, Greece, July 4-8, 2001).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Computer Assisted Instruction; *Computer Uses in Education; Foreign Countries; Latin; Literacy; Pilot Projects; Program Descriptions; *Second Language Learning; Secondary Education; Student Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS	United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

This paper revolves around a pilot project, funded by the DfEE (Department for Education and Employment) in the United Kingdom, which explores ways in which ICT (Information and Communications Technology) can be integrated into the classroom. The Cambridge Online Latin Project aims to promote the teaching of Latin at Key Stage 3 (students of 12-13 years old) through the use of electronic resources based on the Cambridge Latin Course, Book 1. The paper describes and analyses the circumstances in which these resources are needed and have been used. It also focuses on pupils' views on use of electronic resources and on the emergence of a broadening conceptualization of "literacy," evident in the data. (Contains 13 references.) (RS)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 456 454

Revitalising the Learning of Latin: The Recontextualisation of "Literacy" Skills On-Line

by Panos Seranis
University of Cambridge, UK

Paper presented at the Education Research Network Conference on Learning (8th, Spetses, Greece, July 4-8, 2001)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
P. Seranis
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
2A

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CS 217 700

Revitalising the learning of Latin: The recontextualisation of 'literacy' skills on-line[*]

Abstract: *This paper revolves around a pilot project, funded by the DfEE (Department for Education and Employment) in the U.K, which explores ways in which ICT can be integrated into the classroom. The Cambridge Online Latin Project aims to promote the teaching of Latin through the use of electronic resources based on the Cambridge Latin Course, Book 1.*

The paper describes and analyses the circumstances in which these resources are needed and have been used. It also focuses on pupils' views on the use of electronic resources and on the emergence of a broadening conceptualisation of 'literacy', evident in the data.

Setting out the context

The Cambridge On-line Latin Project (COLP hereafter) is a pilot project, funded by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) in the UK, to test the effectiveness of electronic resources in the teaching of Latin at Key Stage 3 (students of 12/13 years old). COLP is part of a major Government initiative to promote the teaching and learning of subjects, for which there is a shortage of specialist teachers in the UK.

A shortage of specialist teachers is particularly true in the case of Latin, as only Cambridge University and King's College in London offer training for specialist teachers in the UK. These two institutions combined offer no more than 30 places every year. In terms of public examination entry, the last ten years have proven difficult for Latin, with statistics showing a steady decline in entries. Between 1990 and 1999 there was a 31 per cent decrease in Latin entries at A-Level and a 28 per cent decrease at GCSE Level.

The decline has been considerably sharper in state schools than in the independent sector. At GCSE Level, for instance, state schools suffer severe slumps exceeding 40 per cent, while private school entries fell by little more than 10 per cent. This is because private schools are free to offer any subject on the curriculum they wish, while state schools are constrained by the National Curriculum (which was introduced in the UK in 1988). Additionally, state schools are unable to sustain classes of small size in the same way that private schools can (Lister and Smith, 2001). These factors suggest that alternative methods need to be found to:

- enable students to learn Latin where the subject was not offered before
- enhance student motivation to study Latin and bring them back to the classroom.

Learning through electronic resources may potentially prove an effective way of promoting the teaching and learning of Latin in the 21st century. The *Cambridge School Classics Project* (CSCP)[1] decided to explore the possibility making use of new technologies to offer the *Cambridge Latin Course* (1998, 4th edition).

---

* I would like to thank CSCP for enabling me to participate in this conference. I am also grateful to Maria Kilby for having read and improved with her 'wicked eye' earlier drafts of this paper.

[1] The Cambridge School Classics Project was introduced in 1966 to revive the teaching of Latin, with an emphasis on autonomous reading and self-assessment 'to help students become aware of their own reading practices and reflect on them' (Seranis, 2000: 6).

An Outline of the Pilot

In the year 2000, 500 students from 21 schools, along with seventeen independent learners (of whom one is an adult), started studying Book 1 of the *Cambridge Latin Course*[2].

The students meet once a week in the respective schools for a study session of approximately 50 minutes. In their first term of study students used the CLC textbooks, the Independent Learning Manuals (ILMs), the Worksheet Masters and the tapes that accompany the course. This was necessary, as the new resources were only made available at the beginning of January 2001, after a successful demonstration and training day, hosted in Cambridge. However, it also made it possible to track any possible changes in student attitudes towards the subject, before and after the electronic resources were launched.

The new resources are heavily dependent on the CLC textbook, so a brief introduction of its structure is essential. The opening image introduces the major theme of the Stage[3], while the Model sentences address the new linguistic feature of each Stage, which is reinforced through the reading of stories. *About the language* segments provide a more systematic explanation of the grammatical phenomena and *Practising the language* sections offer a series of exercises for students to work on. Finally, information about key aspects of the Roman civilisation is provided at the end of each Stage, followed by a rich set of images, pictures, maps and reconstructions of original artefacts found in Pompeii.

The new resources are designed to cater for the diverse circumstances in which they may be used. 5 out of the 21 pilot schools already provide Latin within the school curriculum. The Latin teachers in these schools are able to select which electronic resources they wish to use in much the same way as they made use of the audio-tapes and slides that supplement the course. But the majority of schools are offering Latin off timetable without the services of a trained Latin specialist[4], and they are provided with a more structured pathway through the resources, together with an *e-tutor* to support the students' learning.

One of the challenges of providing Latin through electronic resources is to meet the range of circumstances in which they will be used in school. Amongst the models in place in schools participating in the project are:

- A Year 8 class, on timetable, with a Latin specialist (the 'traditional' classroom);
- A Year 8 after-school club with no Latin specialist teacher;
- A Year 8 class, on timetable, with an English teacher who studied Latin as part of her degree;
- A Year 9 lunchtime club with no Latin specialist;
- A KS3 Latin club run by a school governor (from 7 to 8 o'clock in the evenings).

---

[2] The stories in Book 1 revolve around Caecilius, a Roman banker, and his family and are set in Pompeii.
[3] The CLC textbook is divided into 12 Stages (chapters).
[4] The vast majority of the facilitators (as the people who supervise the Latin sessions are called) were teachers at the respective schools. In two schools only, a school governor and an administration officer were responsible for running the sessions.

The different environments described above cater for a variety of learning needs and therein lies the challenge! In this paper, particular emphasis is placed on the learning of Latin with no specialist teachers in the classroom. Before moving on to the main discussion it needs to be stressed that, as this is an on-going project, these are only preliminary ideas as to what are:

- the key elements of the new model of 'literacy' that emerges from the exploration of the texts through the use of ICT;
- the potential benefits of the electronic resources for the learning of Latin.

The emergent notion of 'literacy' on-line

'Being literate' in the Information Technology era requires a redefinition of the very notion of 'literacy'. In their paper, Adams and Brindley (1999) discriminate between three different models:

- *'schooled'* literacy[5], i.e. the traditional role of the school in the teaching of reading and writing;
- *'networked'* literacy, which highlights the production and interpretation of multi-layered texts (often created by multiple authorship) and interpreted by the students in collaboration;
- *'extended'* literacy, which emphasises that classrooms of the future would be in a position to extend beyond the limits of time and place, so that students in different parts of the world can work together in the making and exploration of texts.

'Networked' literacy: An exemplar based on the Cambridge On-line Latin Project

My involvement in the On-line Latin Project made me aware of the practise of 'networked' literacy through my observation and research in schools. Based on Lankshear and Snyder (2000: 44-47), I propose a 3D model of 'networked' literacy, as follows:

- *Operational dimension*: students' ability to log on and navigate through the resources, and submit their work electronically to the e-tutor;
- *Collaborative dimension*[6]: students' ability to work collaboratively and actively engage in their learning; make comparisons between the culture of the Roman world and the modern day, looking at similarities and differences;
- *Critical dimension*: students' ability to actively use the material, making critical statements about the value of technology in their learning of Latin.

---

[5] This is based on Margaret Meek's (1991) understanding of how literacy is approached in a traditional school environment. See also Meek (1993), where the author argues about the existence of 'multiple literacies' of the future.

[6] Lanskshear and Snyder (2000) opt for the 'cultural' dimension that provides 'meaningful and motivating links to insider versions of social practices' (p. 45). I put forward the 'collaborative' dimension, instead, since one of the main arguments against using computers in the Classics (but not solely) classroom is that it increases passivity towards learning (Magrath, 2001) and leads to isolated learning environments lacking the social element of a 'traditional' classroom.

The following analysis examines whether —and to what extent— these dimensions are addressed in the course of the pilot.

Applying skills to a contextual framework

In order to use the resources, students need to be able to type a URL, when working on-line. If they are working off-line, they need to be able to access the resources from a CD-ROM or retrieve the content file by typing in the content path. In both cases, it is necessary that they type in their log on and password details. Use of the electronic resources — when many students are learning at different paces in the same room — requires the ability to plug in headphones. They also need to know how to use email to communicate with their e-tutors.

What is important is that these skills are used within a particular context, the learning of Latin[7]. This involves the use of a skill students already have —since they all knew how to send emails—but applying it in new ways and for different purposes. Sending emails, which used to be a fun activity and a way to communicate with friends and relatives, becomes a channel of communication with a distant tutor and a means for receiving assessment. Using a moderated web-board, students can access schemes of work submitted by their e-tutor, post their own work to them and exchange ideas with both their classmates and students in other schools through asynchronous communication[8].

Students need not only to know the mechanics of keyboarding but also to develop skills to use them efficiently. One teacher reported that most students in her class lack fast typing skills and consequently spend more time on the computer typing their responses to their e-tutor than they would if the task were to be completed on paper.

Nevertheless, students themselves in their comments emphasised that it is not so much new skills they need to master, as the application of already existing schemata in different contexts. This is the decisive factor in the successful use of the resources in the classroom:

> It is a different way of learning: up to now we used the Internet for computer games and for sending emails.

> You don't need to know an awful lot, as long as you know how to get to it properly, how to send the emails with attachments. People of my generation find it easy to respond to sounds, images etc. We watch TV, we play video games, so this is part of our entertainment.

It has yet to be examined, however, whether the use of electronic media offers students opportunities for active engagement in the learning process and peer collaboration.

---

[7] Lankshear and Snyder (2000:47) emphasise that when skills are 'taught' in decontextualised ways, then the learning outcomes are not always explicit. They report of a class learning to use email through the medium of a game. The activity went on for a several weeks, at the end of which the Year 7 student who was the subject of the study told the researcher it had been fun, but she did not really know what it was all about.

[8] This was, however, a new skill, since students were not familiar with using a web-board.

Promoting effective collaboration

The ability to work collaboratively is a key element in learning. It is more so in the Latin sessions where electronic resources are used, because the classroom environment is, to a large extent, student led. Students have control of the learning situation: they can work at their own pace and they can decide for themselves what piece of information is necessary and how their learning should be structured. It was also found that students' first port of call when they need help was their peers:

> In other lessons, the teachers actually teach you, here they just supervise you. The resources are enough, they help you to learn. We are allowed to talk and this helps us to learn more freely. You can ask your classmates if you don't know something.
>
> I like it when we work in groups. I think you learn better when you learn from each other
>
> The teacher does less talking now and we discuss our answers with our classmates.

It is apparent from the students' comments that technology offers opportunities for learner-control and increased motivation that can enhance student achievement and promote the notion of self- and peer-assessment. If the goal is to facilitate a model of education where learners have a right to a point of view and where this view has a status, a necessity arises for producing the conditions, which would make such a model possible.

These conditions need to be addressed on two levels:

- the creation of content that encourages students to engage actively in the learning process
- the creation of a learning environment, that allows students both to reflect on the ways they learn and to work collaboratively[9].

There is a number of activities in the electronic resources used in the Latin sessions that require collaboration. Students, for instance, are shown a video on the Romans and their slaves which also includes allusions to exploitation of the workforce nowadays. After the video they are presented with an activity, entitled *Slavery: Then and Now* and they are asked to make a comparison between ancient and modern slavery. They need to work as a team and produce an illustrated report of their findings[10].

Another example would be a translation exercise, which challenges students' perception of the power of the computer as a learning tool. Students are asked to write their own translation of a passage and then find a partner and compare their translations, trying to produce an improved joint one at the end of their discussions. Then they are asked to look at a translation on the computer, make a note of the good points and incorporate any of those points that they consider will further improve their version. Finally, they can post their efforts in the classroom and as a class they select the three best translations from the class to post on the web board. The last step is to

---

[9] As Scrimshaw (1993) argues by simply putting learners together in front of a computer will not ensure peer facilitation of their learning.

[10] A set of web links is also included in the resources and acts as the starting point for students' research.

see whether work submitted by other schools offers new ideas that have not been considered by their own school.

In the activity "Vote for who?', students are also asked to work in groups to select, from six candidates, one for the office of *duovir* or *aedilis*. They then mount a campaign, on that candidate's behalf, to try to win either a local election in their *ward* (class) or a wider contest across the *town* (an inter-school election across the web). Students need to think about which candidate stands more chances of winning taking into account his background, his influence and what he is offering to the voters. Voting takes place either in their class or, if they wish, they can enter their candidate in the town election (in the Election Forum on the web).

This activity, part of a series of activities, addresses issues of citizenship, not only in Roman, but also in modern times. Students can actively engage in debates about politics and the importance of elections and identify similarities and differences between then and now. They work with their fellow classmates in their own class, but collaboration can also go beyond the boundaries of a single classroom.

All the activities mentioned above require students to develop critical responses to the stimuli provided. They can exchange ideas and understandings and, in the light of new suggestions offered by their fellow classmates, they reshape and refine their own ways of responding to the material. As Rosenblatt (1982) argues in a different context, reflecting on what peers say about the same 'text' may lead students to a sense of 'self-awareness and self-criticism subsequently helping them to produce more considered responses' (p.276).

The critical dimension of literacy

The concept of 'networked' literacy necessitates an expanded definition of the 'text'[11]: a text combines sound, still and moving images, graphics, and web links. Therefore, students need to reflect which medium — or which combination of media— helps them arrive at a better understanding of Latin.

According to students, the visual and audio elements of the resources help them to understand the language better; the stories become clearer, the characters come to life and the background information about civilisation is also illuminated through the videos and the interactive material:

> The Latin side is really good. You can understand the culture better: understanding the theatre, for instance, is very important.
>
> You get to learn more about the characters; you can see whether they are happy or sad. Clemens [the slave] seems loyal, but at the same time he wants to be free and Grumio [the cook] is kind of lazy.
>
> The videos help, because you can tell a lot about the characters judging from their facial expressions. Metella, for instance, seems to be a bit snobbish.

[11] Interestingly enough, the word derives from the Latin textus (tissue), texere (weave). A text is made by weaving together a combination of signs and symbols in designs intended to create meaning.

Hearing the Latin also helps students improve their pronunciation (in most of the pilot schools the Latin sessions are monitored by teachers with little or no knowledge of Latin):

> It helps with pronunciation, when people say things to you; it is easier to understand.
>
> Hearing is important, it helps with pronunciation, and you get a feel for the language…
>
> You can listen to it; it is easier to understand. Because it is interesting you enjoy it more.

Students also found that they have control over their learning when working on their own. The fact that they can experiment using the resources, follow a non-linear approach in finding their way round the material—something that the sequential structure of the book does not necessarily encourage—brings a sense of empowerment and autonomy over their own learning. This, in turn, reinforces their self-esteem and motivates them to continue studying Latin:

> The role [of the teacher] is to supervise us; you explore your own files. In other lessons the teacher sets all the work, you do not have any choices.
>
> In other lessons you sit at a desk and you listen to the teacher, who can go on and on and on…Here it is different, because you do things for yourself.

Closely linked with students' self-esteem and motivation is the non-judgmental environment, in which students learn, when using the electronic resources. Computers point out mistakes and prompt students to try again but 'they don't shout at you', as one student put it.

Students' comments also revealed their ability to make explicit their theories of learning:

> It [the computer] gets the message across more quickly, you get onto things with the click of a button. It involves less writing and it is easier to remember, especially when people speak to you and when they give you examples.
>
> You can cover more material in less time; it is very much a one to one approach. It also involves less writing and you can do the exercises at home.
>
> I have an amazingly low drive of self-motivation. If I were on my own, my progress would be very slow. I have almost no self-discipline, so i would prefer to have somebody to tell me what I need to do and this is where the e-tutor role is very helpful.

Students raised a number of interesting issues concerning their learning: the role of the teacher in the classroom; the importance of peer collaboration in learning; the one to one interaction with the computer; the notion of 'scaffolding' as a powerful tool of improving their motivation to learn.

It is important that students feel able to 'interrogate' the text. The material designed is asking students to be critical and reflective users of the resources. They are asked, for instance, to look at videos critically to find positive elements to include in their own performances and ways in which their own performances were better. Furthermore, they are invited, as mentioned above, to challenge translations of stories on the computer and suggest improvements. It also asks them to be active participants in learning by giving them the opportunity to act out stories, design their own activities and explore different media. Students are provided with guide boxes that (a) focus on how they should use the resources to achieve learning outcomes and (b) provide active support for new learning processes by drawing attention to key elements of the activities. The intention here is to motivate students, make them feel more comfortable and alleviate any possible lack of confidence by telling them the 'whys' and 'whats' of the activities beforehand[12].

Conclusions

The use of electronic resources is not a panacea for what counts as problematical in the areas of teaching and learning, let alone the teaching and learning of Latin[13]. What the resources offer, however, is the opportunity for students to learn a new language, which they would not have had otherwise. They also offer them the chance to take control of their learning processes and become more independent learners.

This new learning environment suggests that we need to redefine not only our understanding of 'literacy', but also of the pedagogical processes that will allow us to describe and analyse students' cognitive and metacognitive strategies as employed in the area of 'networked' literacy. This is not yet fully explored, partly due to the lack of an appropriate metalanguage[14] to talk about students' experiences under the new circumstances and partly because so far we have not adequately developed assessment methods that can illustrate how computer-assisted learning affects the acquisition by students of new skills and aptitudes[15].

Therefore, research in the area should develop the processes that would allow us to gain insight into the learning strategies students employ in order to extract meaning from electronic 'texts'. Additionally, we need to explore how these learning strategies differ from the ones employed in traditional paper-based courses and their impact on students' thinking about their learning.

---

[12] Sumner and Taylor (2000) quote research supporting the view that this also improves students' performance.

[13] Both teachers and students identified a number of problems with integrating new technologies in the classroom: lack of reliable machines and dedicated computer rooms for student use; insufficient technical support at a school level; lack of immediate feedback to student questions; inability, on the facilitators' part, to monitor their students' progress, to mention but a few.

[14] As Adams and Brindley (1999) rightly point out, we talk about technologies of the future based on analogies from the past. 'The very use of such language ... (windows, wallpaper, desktop, folders, waste paper basket) locks us *imaginatively* into the past and conceals from us the *technologically* innovative nature of the new medium with which we are moving rapidly into the future' (p.1241).

[15] For the potential of developing digital student portfolios as an assessment and evaluation tool, see Irvine and Barlow (1998).

According to Papert (1993), becoming literate means thinking differently from how one did previously, seeing the world differently. If this is the kind of awareness we wish our students to develop, then the following comment, by a student participating in the pilot, is particularly telling:

> Latin is taught on a basis of a real person and a story; it is like reading someone's diary, it is more personal. It is also more fun now: before I thought of Latin as a church language and now it is more like a real language. People did actually speak fluently in Latin.

Bibliography

Adams, A. and Brindle S. (1999) 'Reconceptualising Literacy in the Information Age'. *Proceedings of SITE 99, pp. 1237-1241*

Cambridge Latin Course, Book 1 (4th edition, 1998). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Irvine, S. and Barlow, J. (1998) 'The Digital Portfolio in Education: an innovative learning and assessment tool'. *Journal of Information Technology for Teacher Education 7* (3), pp. 321-330.

Lankshear, C and Snyder, I. (2000) *Teachers and techno-literacy: Managing teaching, technology and learning in schools*. Allen and Unwin: Australia.

Lister, B. and Smith, T. (2001) 'Learning Latin by Electronic Media: Edging into the Future'. *CALICO Journal 18* (2), pp. 235-248.

Magrath, W. (2001) 'A Return to Interactivity: The Third Wave in Educational Uses of Information Technology'. *CALICO Journal 18* (2), pp.283-294.

Meek, M. (1991) *On Being Literate*. London: Bodley Head.

Meek, M. (1993) What will literacy be like? in Styles, M. and Drummond, M. (eds) *The Politics of Reading*. Cambridge: Institute of Education and Homerton College, pp. 89-99.

Papert, S. (1993) *The children's machine: rethinking school in the age of the computer*. New York: Basic Books.

Rosenblatt, L.M. (1982) 'The Literacy Transaction: Evocation and Response'. *Theory into Practice XXI* (4), pp. 268-278.

Scrimshaw, P. (ed.) (1993) *Language, Classroom and Computers*. London: Routledge.

Seranis, P. (2000) *The place of reader response in the teaching of Ancient Greek literature in translation*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation. Cambridge University.

Sumner, T. and Taylor, J. (2000, reprint) 'Media integration through meta-learning environments', in Eisenstadt, M. and Vincent, T. (eds) *The Knowledge Web* (pp. 63-78). Kogan Page: London.

Address for correspondence:

Panos Seranis
School of Education
17 Trumpington Street
Cambridge, CB2 1QA
United Kingdom

pseranis@hotmail.com